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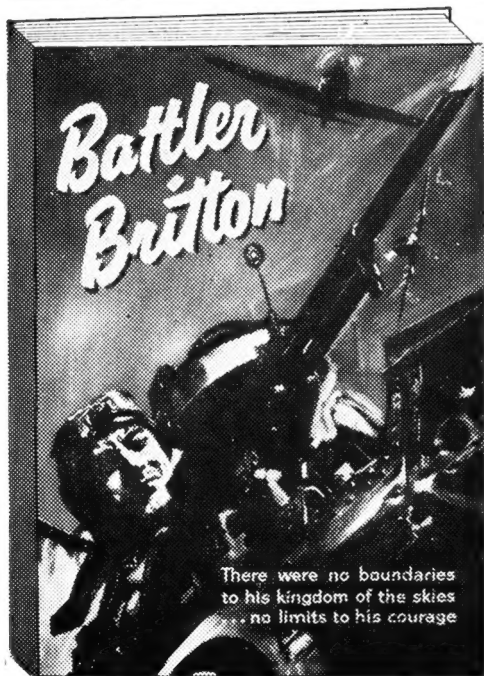
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TIDE OF WAR



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BATTLER BRITTON

TIDE of WAR

FEBRUARY, 1941, SAW THE FALL OF SINGAPORE. BENEATH THE SWARMING TIDE OF JAPANESE AGGRESSION, THE NAVAL AND MILITARY MIGHT OF AMERICA AND BRITAIN, HAD BEEN HUMBLLED BY SUDDEN SAVAGE ATTACKS BUT THERE WAS NO HINT OF SUBMISSION AMONGST THE ALLIES, ONLY A BURNING RESOLUTION TO FIGHT BACK UNTIL FINAL VICTORY BE WON.



Chapter 1. LAST SHIP FROM SINGAPORE

SHEPHERDING THE MOTLEY FLEET THAT FLED FROM BATTERED SINGAPORE WAS A HANDFUL OF OVERWORKED NAVAL WARSHIPS OF WHICH THE BRITISH DESTROYER, *H.M.S. DAGGER*, WAS ONE.



ATTACKED BY BOMB AND CANNON-SHELL, SHE FOUGHT GALLANTLY AGAINST RELENTLESS PURSUERS WHO HAD THE SCENT OF VICTORY IN THEIR NOSTRILS.

THE ATTACKS DIED DOWN AND ALMOST INSTANTLY, *DAGGER* RECEIVED FRESH ORDERS. HER FIRST LIEUTENANT, 'RUSH' RUSHTON, R.N.V.R., DELIVERED THE MESSAGE TO THE BRIDGE IN HIS OWN BREEZY STYLE . . .

MORE SHAGGY SHEEP-DOG STUFF FOR THE POOR OLD *DAGGER*, SKIPPER— WE'RE TO ROUND UP A SHIP STOOGING ABOUT OVER TO THE EAST.



DAGGER'S SKIPPER, COMMANDER G.N. BARKER, R.N., WAS RUSH'S COMPLETE OPPOSITE. A REGULAR RAMROD FOR DISCIPLINE, HE DETESTED HIS LIEUTENANT'S LIGHT-HEARTED MANNER.

NUMBER ONE, YOU WILL ADDRESS ME WITH THE RESPECT DUE TO MY RANK AND DELIVER YOUR MESSAGE IN PROPER NAVAL TERMS.



WITH AN INWARD GRIN THE RED-HEADED RUSHTON COMPLIED IN HIS BEST SERVICE MANNER.

Tide of War

COMMANDER BARKER COLDLY TOOK THE CORRECTED MESSAGE AND SNAPPED AN ALTERED COURSE DOWN THE VOICE PIPE. NOT BY A FLICKER DID HE BETRAY HIS IMPATIENCE AT THE CALL TO LOOK FOR A STRAY SHIP...

STEP LIVELY, NUMBER ONE, AND SEE TO IT THAT EVERY MAN STAYS AT HIS POST.

I WAS HOPING THE PORT WATCH COULD STAND DOWN, SIR—THEY'VE HAD NO SLEEP SINCE—



BUT THE COMMANDER BRUSQUELY DISMISSED HIS SUGGESTION AND RUSH FOUND HE NEEDED ALL THE POPULARITY HE ENJOYED AMONGST THE MEN TO KEEP FRAYED TEMPERA IN HAND, ESPECIALLY WITH THE DOG-TIRED PORT WATCH.

STAY ON READINESS!
BLOW ME!

WE AIN'T HAD ANY
DECENT SLEEP FOR THIRTY
HOURS, SIR!

SORRY,
LADS!



ON HIS ROUNDS, RUSH MET DOUGLAS NEWMAN, THE SHIP'S YOUNG SURGEON OFFICER. FROM THE START, RUSH HAD FELT DRAWN TO THE QUIET-SPOKEN KENTISH MAN WITH HIS EVEN TEMPER AND GRAVELY HUMOROUS MANNER.



INEVITABLY, THE SUBJECT OF THEIR CAPTAIN CROPPED UP...



FOR SEVERAL HOURS THE *DAGGER* STEAMED EASTWARD, SEARCHING IN VAIN FOR THE OTHER SHIP. ALREADY SMARTING UNDER THE SHAMEFUL RETREAT FROM SINGAPORE, COMMANDER BARKER FELT THE COLD FLAME OF HATRED HE HAD FOR THE JAPANESE INCREASING . . .



ONE DAY HE WOULD GET THE CHANCE TO HIT BACK, AND HE WOULD DO IT WITH CALCULATED THOROUGHNESS.

SUDDENLY A LOOK-OUT'S CRY CUT THE AIR . . . BUT TOO LATE TO AVOID THE TORPEDO WHICH SLAMMED INTO THE SHIP'S STERN . . .



THE EXPLOSION CARRIED AWAY THE STEERING AND WRENCHED OPEN PLATES. ALARMS JANGLED AS THE HUNGRY WATER POURED IN.

THEN . . .



SUCH WAS THE DIN OF ALARM BELLS THAT ONLY A FEW, INCLUDING THE FIRST LIEUTENANT, HEARD THE DESPERATE CRY. RACING AFT, RUSH SAW WITH RELIEF THAT DOUGLAS HAD MANAGED TO GRAB A LIFELINE BUT HE LOOKED DAZED.

GET ME A LIFE-BELT. QUICK, I'M GOING IN AFTER HIM.



BUT EVEN AS RUSH TORE AT HIS JACKET A TELEPHONE RANG. IT WAS FROM THE BRIDGE . . .

CAPTAIN'S
ORDERS - STAND
BY DEPTH CHARGES,
SIR. SUBMARINE
ATTACK!

DEPTH CHARGES! WITH
MISTER NEWMAN DOWN
THERE IN THE WATER!



ON THE BRIDGE, COMMANDER BARKER HAD NO EARS FOR ANYTHING BUT THE RINGING OF THE ASDIC UNDER-WATER DETECTOR. THE NOTE WAS GROWING FASTER, TELLING HIM OF THE SUBMARINE'S FURTIVE APPROACH...



HIS CONCENTRATION WAS SO INTENSE THAT NOT EVEN THE SLOW TILTING OF THE DECK AS THE WATERS TOOK HOLD BELOW COULD DISTURB HIM.

AS RUSH STORMED TOWARDS THE BRIDGE, HE NATURALLY THOUGHT BARKER KNEW OF NEWMAN'S DANGER AND YET WAS STILL COLD-BLOODEDLY INTENT ON DEPTH CHARGING...



I'VE HAD ALL I CAN TAKE OF THAT INHUMAN RAMROD! HE'S NOT GETTING AWAY WITH THIS - IT'S SHEER MURDER!

Tide of War

COMMANDER BARKER'S EYES WERE GLEAMING WITH SAVAGE SATISFACTION.
THE ENEMY SUBMARINE WAS ALMOST WITHIN RANGE . . .

MY SHIP'S FINISHED
BUT, BY HEAVENS, SHE'LL
TAKE THAT SUBMARINE
WITH HER!

NOW! THIS WAS THE MOMENT!
COMMANDER BARKER GRABBED
THE TELEPHONE TO BARK THE
FIRE ORDER . . .



BUT BEFORE HE COULD GIVE THE COMMAND, A ROUGH HAND SPUN HIM ROUND... AND HE FOUND HIMSELF STARING INTO THE ANGRY FACE OF HIS FIRST LIEUTENANT.

NO, YOU DON'T!
PUT THAT PHONE
DOWN!



YOU'RE NOT GOING
TO KILL NEWMAN!

TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF ME!
ARE YOU MAD?



BARKER WRENCHED AWAY. HE HAD TO GIVE THE FIRE ORDER—NOW—OR THE SUBMARINE WOULD ESCAPE.

GET AWAY,
YOU FOOL! THE
SUBMARINE... AAGH!



THEN COMMANDER BARKER CRASHED TO THE DECK AS RUSHTON'S FIST THUDDed AGAINST HIS JAW...

WHY... YOU
...HIT ME!
YOUR SUPERIOR
OFFICER!



LEAVING BARKER TO STRUGGLE TO HIS FEET, RUSH RACED AWAY TO SAVE HIS FRIEND. AN INSTANT LATER, THE SHIP GAVE ANOTHER LURCH ... AND A WHITE-FACED RATING APPEARED ON THE SLOPING BRIDGE.



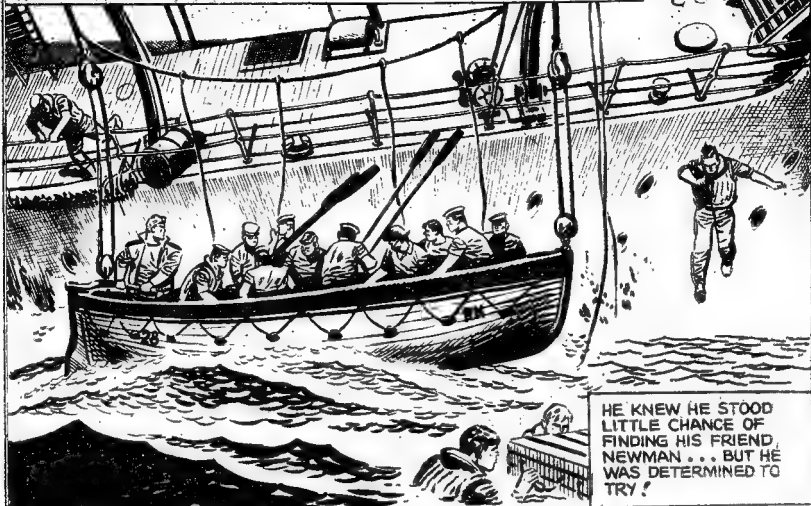
THEN, FOR THE FIRST TIME, BARKER TOOK IN THE HEELING SHIP. IT COULD ONLY BE A MATTER OF MINUTES. HE NODDED ASSENT AND THE RATING YELLED INTO THE TANNON!



AS THE BLOOD-CHILLING COMMAND RANG OUT ALONG THE SWILLING DECKS, MEN FLUNG THEMSELVES INTO THE WATER TO GRASP FRANTICALLY AT THE FLOATS. OTHERS PILED INTO LIFEBOATS — ALL WAS DESPERATE HASTE TO GET AWAY BEFORE THE DOOMED SHIP MADE ITS FINAL PLUNGE.

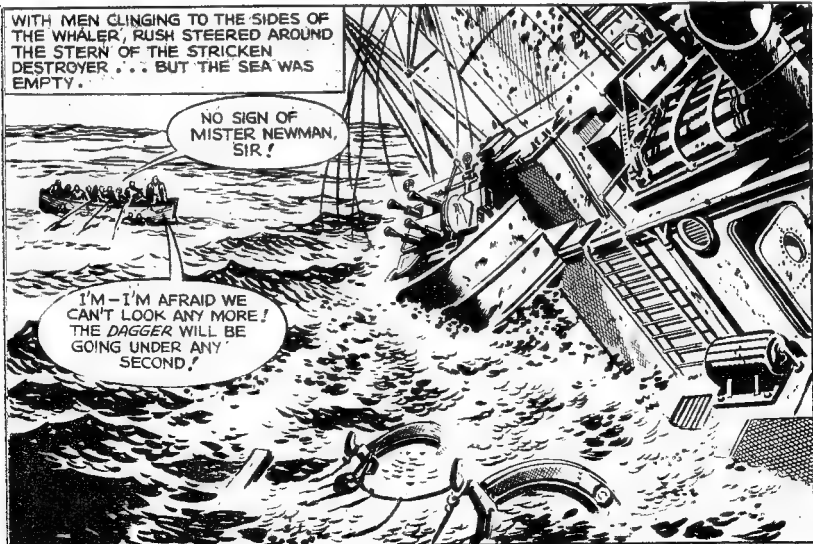


ON HEARING THE CRY TO ABANDON, RUSH QUICKLY TOOK OVER COMMAND OF A LIFEBOAT.



HE KNEW HE STOOD LITTLE CHANCE OF FINDING HIS FRIEND, NEWMAN . . . BUT HE WAS DETERMINED TO TRY!

WITH MEN CLINGING TO THE SIDES OF THE WHALER, RUSH STEERED AROUND THE STERN OF THE STRICKEN DESTROYER . . . BUT THE SEA WAS EMPTY.



NO SIGN OF MISTER NEWMAN, SIR!

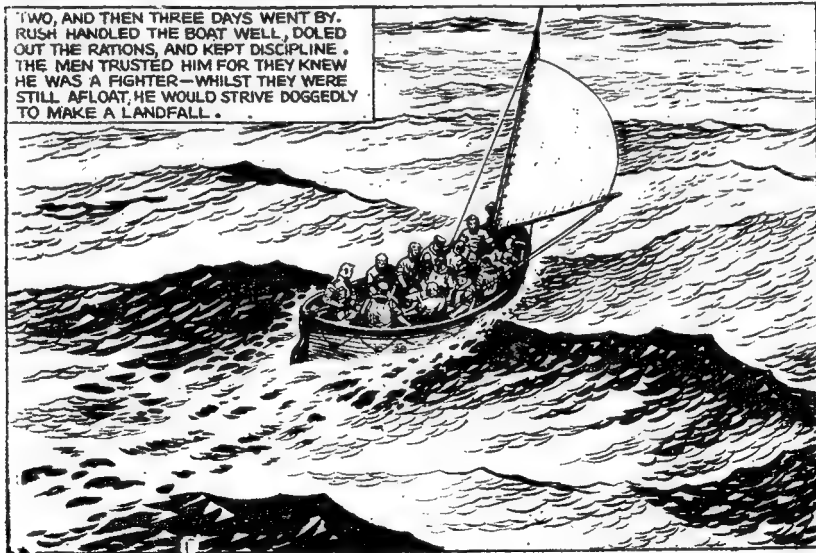
I'M—I'M AFRAID WE CAN'T LOOK ANY MORE! THE DAGGER WILL BE GOING UNDER ANY SECOND!

TWILIGHT CAME AND THEN THE SWIFT TROPICAL NIGHT. DAWN FOUND THEM ALONE ON A RISING SEA. A SQUALLING WIND TAXED RUSH'S SEAMANSHIP TO THE FULL.

DOWN SAIL!
THROW OUT THE
SEA-ANCHOR! WE'LL
RIDE THIS OUT!



TWO, AND THEN THREE DAYS WENT BY. RUSH HANDLED THE BOAT WELL, DOLED OUT THE RATIONS, AND KEPT DISCIPLINE. THE MEN TRUSTED HIM FOR THEY KNEW HE WAS A FIGHTER—WHILST THEY WERE STILL AFLOAT, HE WOULD STRIVE DOGGEDLY TO MAKE A LANDFALL.



AND RUSH JUSTIFIED THE MEN'S FAITH. THREE DAYS LATER, THEY REACHED LAND AND WERE FOLLOWING A SMALL COASTAL PACKET INTO BANDATANG, BORNEO, THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY MILES EAST OF SINGAPORE.

THIS OUGHT TO BE BORNEO — BUT DON'T ASK ME WHERE!

WHEREVER IT IS, IT'S LAND, SKIPPER!



BUT THEIR SMILES DIED WHEN THEY SAW THAT JAP BOMBING HAD REDUCED THE ONCE PROSPEROUS HARBOUR TO A SHAMBLES! EVERYWHERE THEY LOOKED THEY SAW THE LITTER OF AN ARMY IN RETREAT.

LUMME! WHAT A DUMP TO LAND UP IN!



STIFF AND HUNGRY BUT GLAD TO FEEL SOLID EARTH ONCE MORE, THE MEN TROOPED ASHORE. RUSH FINALLY FERRETED OUT A HARASSED TRANSPORT OFFICER WHO GAVE THEM DEPRESSING NEWS.

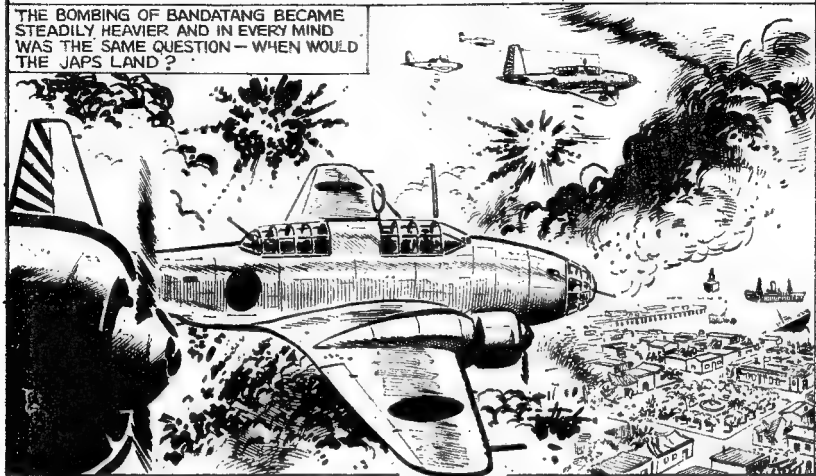


CAMP B PROVED TO BE AN OVERCROWDED COMPOUND WHERE EVERYONE WAITED LISTLESSLY FOR ORDERS. WITHIN FOUR DAYS, RUSH WAS FRETTING FOR ACTION...



Chapter 2, SHOCK ESCORT

THE BOMBING OF BANDATANG BECAME STEADILY HEAVIER AND IN EVERY MIND WAS THE SAME QUESTION — WHEN WOULD THE JAPS LAND?



THEN AN R.A.F. JEEP ARRIVED TO TAKE RUSH TO THE NAVAL HEADQUARTERS.

GOOD, ACTION
AT LAST, EH?



RUSH WAS USHERED INTO THE OFFICE OF A CAPTAIN EDWARDS, R.N. AND AS THE DOOR CLOSED BEHIND HIM, HE SUDDENLY GAVE A START OF SURPRISE . . .



FOR APART FROM CAPTAIN EDWARDS, THE ROOM ALSO CONTAINED THE FORBIDDING FIGURE OF . . . *COMMANDER BARKER!*

THERE IS CERTAINLY NO NEED FOR INTRODUCTIONS, IS THERE, RUSHTON? WHAT I HAVE TO SAY IS NOT GOING TO BE PLEASANT. BUT FIRST A FEW WORDS OF EXPLANATION.





AND THEN RUSH WAS TOLD JUST HOW SERIOUS THINGS WERE FOR HIM :

LIEUTENANT RUSHTON, THERE NOW REMAINS FOR ME TO TELL YOU THAT PENDING AN ENQUIRY, YOU ARE PLACED UNDER CLOSE ARREST. THE CHARGE IS — ASSAULTING A SUPERIOR OFFICER! . . . TO WIT, YOUR CAPTAIN, COMMANDER BARKER.



THEN COMMANDER BARKER SPOKE, AND RUSH THOUGHT HE DETECTED A MALICIOUS HUMOUR IN THE OTHER'S WORDS . . .

AS IS THE CUSTOM IN THESE CASES YOU WILL BE CONFINED TO QUARTERS UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF A BROTHER OFFICER, UNTIL YOU ARE REQUIRED.



CAPTAIN EDWARDS JABBED AT THE BELL ON HIS DESK AND ANOTHER OFFICER WAS USHERED IN . . .

HERE IS YOUR ESCORT, RUSHTON!



RUSH TURNED AND BLINKED IN WONDER. IT WAS DOUGLAS NEWMAN . . .

SWALLOWING HIS DELIGHT AT THE SIGHT OF HIS FRIEND, RUSH REMAINED AT ATTENTION WHILE THEY LISTENED SOLEMNLY TO THE CAPTAIN'S FINAL WORDS . . .

LIEUTENANT RUSHTON, HERE, IS ON A SERIOUS CHARGE. YOU, NEWMAN, WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS CUSTODY. DO NOT LET HIM OUT OF YOUR SIGHT UNTIL SENT FOR. UNDERSTOOD?



I UNDERSTAND, SIR.

ONCE OUTSIDE THE OFFICE, THE TWO FRIENDS GREETED EACH OTHER JOYFULLY. FOR A MOMENT ALL TROUBLE WAS FORGOTTEN.

IT'S WONDERFUL TO SEE YOU, YOU OLD BONE-MONGER! WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU? I SEARCHED...

I GOT PICKED UP BY THE OTHER BOAT—SO DID BARKER—JUST AS THE OLD DAGGER WENT DOWN. THEN WE WERE SPOTTED BY A TROOPSHIP AND WERE BROUGHT HERE.

BUT THEIR FIRST DELIGHT SOON GAVE PLACE TO MISGIVINGS...

BARKER'S OUT TO BREAK YOU. BUT I'VE ALSO TALKED TO THE CREW. IT SEEMS YOU SAVED MY LIFE, AND GOT YOURSELF INTO THIS TROUBLE DOING IT.

SO BARKER PURPOSELY PICKED ON YOU TO BE MY GAOLER? I CALL THAT A TWISTED SORT OF HUMOUR.



OUTSIDE, THE SAME R.A.F. JEEP STOOD WAITING . . .

I DIDN'T TWIG I WAS UNDER POLICE GUARD WHEN THESE BIRDS BROUGHT ME HERE.

THEY'RE WILLIS AND FOSTER. THEY'LL TAKE US TO MY QUARTERS.

TO MY PRISON, YOU MEAN!



AS THEY SPED AWAY, RUSH REALISED THAT HIS FRIEND WAS ACUTELY EMBARRASSED BY THE SITUATION.

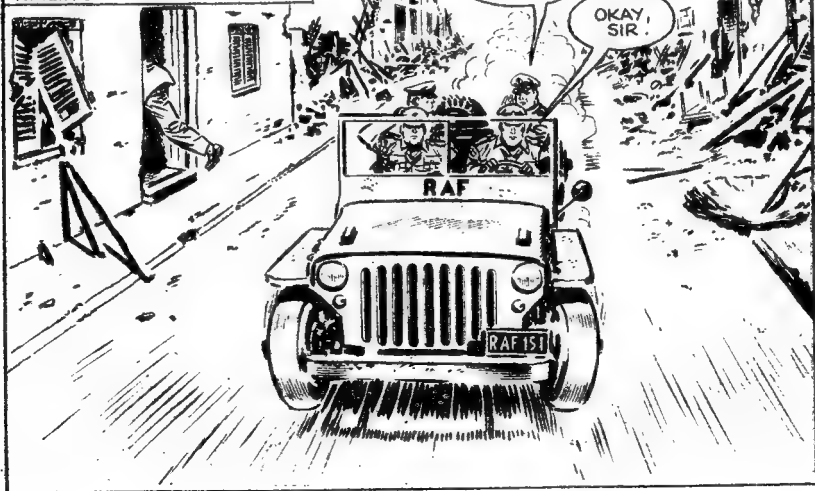
THIS IS MAKING THINGS DARNED AWKWARD FOR HIM - SEEING WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN SUCH PALS.



SECONDS LATER, THE AIR RAID SIRENS BEGAN THEIR BANSHEE WAILING.

STEP ON IT, WILLIS.

OKAY, SIR.



THEN THE JEEP SKIDDED TO A HALT AS A WHISTLING SOUND GREW TO A SHRILL SCREAMING. ALL FOUR MEN SPRANG FOR COVER AS THE FIRST BOMBS FELL.



THE STICK CRASHED DOWN... THEN ANOTHER ! THEN A THIRD BROUGHT DOWN A CASCADE OF MASONRY AROUND THEIR HEADS.



THROUGH THE RUMBLE OF FALLING BRICKWORK, RUSH HEARD THE OTHERS CALLING HIM. HIS EYE FELL ON THE JEEP, STANDING THERE INVITINGLY AND SUDDENLY A WILD URGE TO ESCAPE SEIZED HIM.

HERE'S YOUR
CHANCE TO BUZZ
OFF, RUSH!

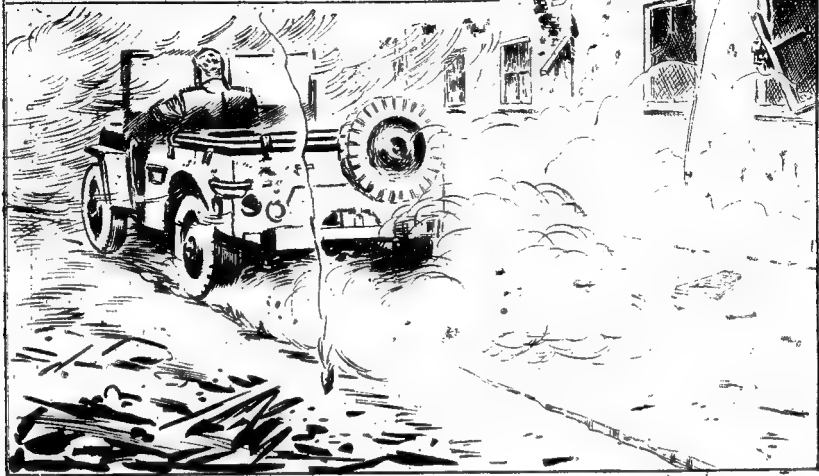


ONCE HAVING SEIZED ON A PLAN OF ACTION, IT WAS RUSH'S WAY TO ACT. IN A MOMENT HE WAS REVVING THE JEEP INTO LIFE AND ROARING DOWN THE STREET.

... AND I'LL BET DOUGLAS WILL
BE PLEASED TO HAVE ME OFF HIS
HANDS — AND OFF HIS
CONSCIENCE!



HE THOUGHT THE SWIRLING DUST WOULD SCREEN HIS GETAWAY BUT HE DID NOT KNOW THAT HIS ENGINE SUMP, FRACTURED BY FALLEN RUBBLE, WAS LEAVING A TRAIL OF OIL.



IF RUSH THOUGHT HIS IMPETUOUS ACTION WAS DOING DOUGLAS NEWMAN A GOOD TURN, HE WAS MISTAKEN.

MISTER RUSHTON
HAS TAKEN THE
JEEP, SIR!

SHALL I FIRE
AT THE TYRES,
SIR?

NO! WE'LL GET
HIM! HE CAN'T
GET FAR!



... SILENTLY, THE YOUNG SURGEON CURSED RUSH FOR A HOT-HEADED FOOL.

RUSH DROVE BLINDLY, KNOWING NOTHING OF HIS DIRECTION. THE MAIN THING WAS TO GET AWAY.

GOT TO VANISH SOMEWHERE... THEN I'LL FIGURE THE NEXT MOVE.



HE HAD LEFT THE TOWN AND SIGHTED THE HILLS WHEN HIS OVERHEATED ENGINE, STARVED OF OIL, SEIZED SOLID. IMPATIENTLY, RUSH PUSHED THE USELESS VEHICLE INTO HIDING.



JUST MY LUCK! BUT THEY WON'T FIND THIS IN A HURRY!

THEN HE MADE TOWARDS THE
JUNGLE-COVERED HILLS . . .

MAYBE I CAN WORK
ROUND TO THE COMPOUND
AGAIN AND GO INTO
HIDING THERE .

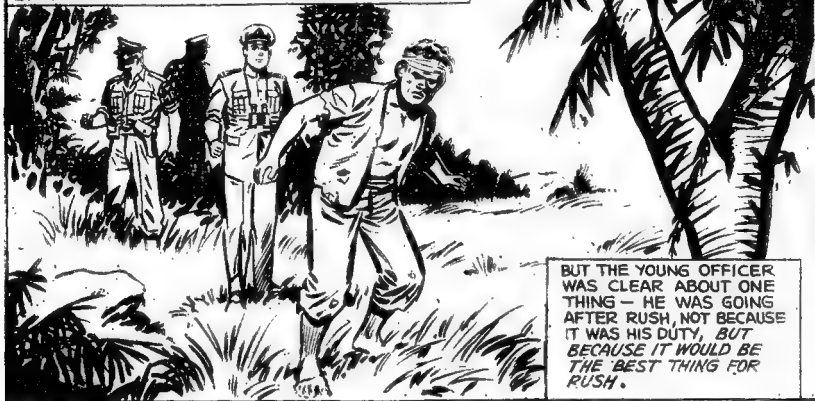
BUT WITH HIS ROUTE BETRAYED BY
THE THIN LINE OF OIL, THE FUGITIVE
WAS SOON TRAILED .

WE WERE RIGHT,
SIR . . . HE'S SEIZED
UP THE ENGINE .

RUSH, YOU IDIOT,
HAVE I GOT TO HUNT
YOU DOWN ?

Chapter 3 THE FUGITIVE

SURGEON LIEUTENANT NEWMAN LOST NO TIME IN OBTAINING A NATIVE TRACKER, AND AS THEY FOLLOWED RUSH'S TRAIL, HE REFLECTED ON HIS UNENVIABLE TASK OF HUNTING DOWN HIS FRIEND.



BUT THE YOUNG OFFICER WAS CLEAR ABOUT ONE THING — HE WAS GOING AFTER RUSH, NOT BECAUSE IT WAS HIS DUTY, BUT BECAUSE IT WOULD BE THE BEST THING FOR RUSH.

HE DID NOT KNOW THAT IN THE TOWN, THE BOMBING HAD CEASED AND A NEW AND MORE TERRIBLE MENACE HAD ARRIVED . . .



RUSH SOON HEARD HIS PURSUERS
CRASHING THROUGH THE JUNGLE
BEHIND HIM . . .

YOU'VE GONE TOO FAR
FOR SECOND THOUGHTS NOW, RUSH
OLD LAD - SO PUSH ON,
REGARDLESS!



BREAKING COVER HIGHER UP IN THE HILLS
HE CAUGHT A FIRST GLIMPSE OF HIS
HUNTERS . . .

DOUGLAS, EH? HE
SHOULD'VE LET ME GET
AWAY, THE CHUMP!



IMPATIENT AT HIS FRIEND'S CONSCIENTIOUSNESS, RUSH TOOK TO A STREAM, HOPING TO SMOTHER HIS TRACKS.



BUT THE NATIVE TRACKER WAS NOT BAFFLED FOR LONG!

THE FUGITIVE SCRAMBLED ON... STILL DRIVEN BY IMPULSE RATHER THAN REASON...



HE PLUNGED ONCE MORE INTO THE LEAFY GREEN HUMIDITY OF THE JUNGLE, BUT A SUDDEN CRASHING IN THE TREES CLOSE BY MADE RUSH SPIN IN STARTLED SURPRISE.



THE JAP WAS ABRUPTLY CAUGHT UP BY HIS HARNESS AND DANGLED IN MID-AIR, KICKING AND PLUNGING.



THEN, THE SOUNDS OF VOICES CAME FROM THE DISTANCE AND THE JAP'S STRUGGLES CEASED AT ONCE — HIS BODY TENSED ALERTLY...



REALISING THE OTHER MEN'S PERIL, RUSH HESITATED A SPLIT SECOND, WEIGHING THE CHANCES — A WARNING SHOUT WOULD FINISH HIS BID FOR FREEDOM, YET TO STAND SILENT AND SEE THAT GUN AIMED MURDEROUSLY...



LOOK OUT, DOUGLAS!
THERE'S A JAP
WAITING FOR YOU!

THE CRY RANG THROUGH THE FOREST AND SENT NEWMAN DARTING TOWARDS THE BEND, TAKING THE ARMED WILLIS WITH HIM. FOSTER HUGGED THE OPPOSITE BANK.



THE ECHOES OF RUSH'S WARNING SHOUT WERE DROWNED IN THE RATTLE OF A SUB-MACHINE GUN AS THE JAP OPENED FIRE ON DOUGLAS NEWMAN AND HIS MEN...



...AND SEIZING HIS OPPORTUNITY, RUSH SPRINTED TOWARDS THE JAP.

BY THE TIME THE OTHERS ARRIVED ON THE SCENE, THE JAP PARATROOPER HAD MANAGED TO FREE HIMSELF FROM HIS HARNESS... AND WAS LOCKED IN A DESPERATE STRUGGLE WITH RUSH.



THEN FOSTER'S GUN CRACKED... EVEN AS THE JAP HAD HIS ATTACKER AT HIS MERCY.



FOR ALL HIS RELIEF, DOUGLAS NEWMAN STILL INTENDED TO CARRY OUT HIS DUTIES - AND RUSH ACCEPTED THE SITUATION WITH AN IRONIC GRIN.

THANKS FOR THE WARNING, RUSH - BUT I'VE STILL GOT TO TAKE YOU BACK. IT WILL ONLY MAKE THINGS WORSE, RUNNING AWAY.

OKAY, GAOLER! I'LL COME QUIETLY!



THE LITTLE PARTY RETURNED TO BANDATANG TO BE MET BY SOUNDS OF BATTLE AROUND THE HARBOUR. THE SURGEON LIEUTENANT FELT THE OTHERS' EYES ON HIM AS IF EXPECTING A DECISION.

WE STILL HAVE TO TRY TO REPORT BACK. WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?



WITH THE CRACK OF RIFLE FIRE AND THE ECHOING THUMP OF DEMOLITIONS EVER IN THEIR EARS, THEY SCRAMBLED OVER RUBBLE BACK TO THE TOWN HALL. BUT THE PLACE WAS A DESERTED WRECK.

WHERE ARE NAVY MEN?

ALL GONE. EVERYONE—THEY GO.



DOUGLAS NEWMAN, UNUSED TO EVENTS OF SUCH VIOLENCE, FELT THE SITUATION GETTING BEYOND HIM. IT WAS RUSH, THE FIGHTER BY TRAINING AND INSTINCT, WHO HAD THE ANSWER.

WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE, DOUGLAS—BACK TO THE HILLS, THE FOUR OF US.

IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE, SIR! NO GOOD THINKING OF A BOAT!



GATHERING ALL THE FOOD AND WEAPONS THEY COULD CARRY, THE FOUR SLIPPED SAFELY OUT OF THE BURNING TOWN AND BACK INTO THE FOREST. IN THE DARK HOURS OF THE NIGHT, THE TWO FRIENDS TALKED THINGS OVER . . .

A RUM BUSINESS, DOUGLAS. YOU, GAOLER, ME, PRISONER - BOTH ON THE RUN! HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT IT?

I TOOK YOU BACK, RUSH - THAT SATISFIES MY CONSCIENCE FOR THE TIME BEING.



BUT SUPPOSE WE MEET UP WITH THE NAVY AGAIN - WHAT THEN?

I'D HAVE TO HAND YOU OVER, RUSH. AND HELP YOU FIGHT THIS CHARGE. YOU CAN'T DODGE IT FOREVER.



RUSH BELIEVED HIM. BUT A HALF-MOCKING GRIN WARNED DOUGLAS NOT TO EXPECT MUCH ASSISTANCE.

IT WAS PLAIN THAT THE JAPS INTENDED TO DO MORE THAN MERELY SNATCH BANDATANG FROM ALLIED HANDS. THE PORT WAS TO BE USED AS A BEACH-HEAD — ALREADY REINFORCEMENTS AND SUPPLIES WERE POURING INTO THE LITTLE HARBOUR.

MORE TROOP SHIPS! LOOKS LIKE THE JAPS MEAN TO TAKE THE WHOLE OF BORNEO!

YOU BET! THEY WANT TO GET THEIR GREEDY PAWS ON THE DUTCH OILWELLS.



THE FOUR CONSIDERED THEIR POSITION. FACED BY A COMMON PERIL, THERE WAS AN UNSPOKEN AGREEMENT TO FORGET FOR THE MOMENT THEIR STRANGE RELATIONSHIP — RUSH THE CAPTIVE AND THE OTHERS HIS CAPTORS. IN FACT HE WAS ACCEPTED AS THEIR NATURAL LEADER...

I SUGGEST WE MAKE FOR TEBANGI. IT'S TWO HUNDRED MILES OF JUNGLE AWAY BUT I RECKON WE COULD DO IT.

H'MM!
WE'D NEED
MORE FOOD...



LEAVE THE GRUB TO ME AND FOSTER, SIR!

WE'LL NIP BACK INTO TOWN AND KNOCK OFF AS MUCH AS WE CAN CARRY!



AND FOR THE FIRST TIME THE YOUNG SURGEON BECAME TRULY AWARE OF THE STERLING QUALITIES OF THESE TWO BRAWNY ARMEN!

BUT RUSH THOUGHT THAT THEY SHOULD DO THE JOB TOGETHER, SO THAT NIGHT...

RICE! NOT ME!

WONDER WHAT THIS IS... ANYBODY READ JAPANESE?

WHIP IT AND TAKE A CHANCE!



STEALING AWAY WITH ALL THEY COULD CARRY, THEY LEFT RUSH TO DENY THE REST OF THE SUPPLIES TO THE ENEMY.

THIS RICE SHOULD BURN LIKE DRY KINDER!



... AND WERE REWARDED BY THE SIGHT OF THE JAPS STRUGGLING WITH THE BLAZING SACKS!

WOW! LOOK AT THAT STUFF BURN! WHAT SAY WE DO SOME MORE SABOTAGE?

SUITS US, SIR!



Chapter 4. SABOTEURS

MODESTLY AT FIRST, AND THEN WITH GROWING BOLDNESS, THEY CARRIED OUT DARING, NIGHT RAIDS ON ENEMY ARMS AND FOOD DUMPS, USING THE ENEMY'S OWN EXPLOSIVES AND THE NATURAL WEAPONS OF FLAME AND WATER.



JAPANESE GUARD PATROLS WERE STRENGTHENED IN THE AREA AND ONE PARTICULARLY DARING RAID ON FRESHLY LANDED SUPPLY TRUCKS NEARLY ENDED IN DISASTER.

LET'S GET OUT,
RUSH—THERE'S MORE
JAPS COMING!



AFTER THAT, IT WAS DECIDED NOT TO PUSH THEIR LUCK ANY FURTHER BUT TO START OUT FOR DISTANT TEBANGI ON THE SOUTHERN COAST.

THERE'S JUST A
CHANCE THE JAPS
HAVEN'T GOT THERE
YET.



LET'S HOPE
WE CAN SCRUNGE
A BOAT.

FOUR NIGHTS LATER FOUND THEM
FOOTSORE BUT UNDAUNTED PERCHED
ON THE HIGH COLD RIDGE OF THE
SANGAMO RANGE, MANY JUNGLE
MILES YET TO THEIR DESTINATION.
ONCE MORE RUSH VENTURED THE
QUESTION WHICH DOUGLAS NEWMAN
HAD HOPED TO AVOID . . .

SUPPOSE WE
MEET THE NAVY
AT TEBANGI, DOUGLAS
- ARE YOU STILL
GOING TO TURN
ME OVER ?

I TOLD YOU BEFORE,
RUSH - IT'S BEST IN THE
LONG RUN . YOU'LL HAVE
TO FACE IT
SOMETIME .



THE DAYS AND NIGHTS MERGED INTO ONE
LONG GRUELLING FIGHT AGAINST HEAT AND
COLD, FATIGUE AND SORES . EACH MAN WAS
ON EDGE - LIABLE TO JUMP AT A SHADOW . . .

RUSH, LOOK!
MEN MOVING!
JAPS!

TAKE IT EASY,
BOY, TAKE IT
EASY. IT'S JUST
TREES!



SOON, THEIR WORST FEARS, WHICH EACH HAD CONCEALED FROM THE OTHERS, BECAME HARSH REALITY...

THAT'S TEBANGI, CHAPS.
BUT I'M AFRAID WE'RE
UNLUCKY!

I MIGHT HAVE
GUESSED IT—
JAPS!

THEY'RE
EVERYWHERE, AN'T
THEY? JUST LIKE
ANTS.



SWALLOWING THEIR DISAPPOINTMENT, THE FOUR SET OFF TO SCOUT...AND FOUND THEIR GLOOM DISSOLVING WITH THE ITCH TO CARRY ON THE SABOTAGE WHERE THEY HAD LEFT OFF AT BANDATANG.

THERE'S A
DUTCH OILWELL—
ONLY HALF
DEMOLISHED.

LOOKS LIKE
THE JAPS ARE
GOING TO PUT
IT RIGHT.

THEN LET'S
PUT IT WRONG
AGAIN, SIR!



AFTER CAREFUL OBSERVATION, THEY SET OUT ONE NIGHT FOR THEIR MOST AMBITIOUS JOB YET— TO FIRE THE OILWELL, WITH PLANNED SMOOTHNESS! THE SENTRYRIES WERE DEALT WITH ONE BY ONE .



WHILE THE OTHERS STOOD GUARD, RUSH SECURED A HOME-MADE EXPLOSIVE TO A MAIN OIL PIPE . . .

THIS SHOULD DO THE TRICK!



A RIVER OF LIQUID FIRE SPURTING IN ALL DIRECTIONS FROM THE FRACTURED PIPE AND THE SABOTEURS TOOK TO THEIR HEELS.



BUT THE LEAPING FLAMES STARKLY SILHOUETTED THE FLEEING BRITISH. . .

SHOOT THEM DOWN!

RUN FOR IT!



RUSH BIT ON. A CRY AS A BULLET SEARED INTO HIS THIGH. SICK WITH PAIN, HE FORCED HIMSELF ON, STRAINING TO REACH THE SANCTUARY OF THE DARK JUNGLE.

QUICK, RUSH!
WHY—WHAT'S
UP?



I'M
COMING.

THE SOUND OF PURSUIT FILLED THE AIR AS DOUGLAS TURNED BACK TO HELP HIS FRIEND ...

YOU TWO KEEP
GOING. I'LL TAKE CARE
OF MISTER RUSHTON.



IN THE NICK OF TIME, NEWMAN SCRAMBLED RUSH INTO HIDING, STIFLING THE WOUNDED MAN'S INVOLUNTARY GASPS OF PAIN AS JAP FEET PADDED BY.



WHEN ALL SEEMED QUIET, THE YOUNG SURGEON BOUND UP RUSH'S LEG WITH BANDAGES TORN FROM HIS OWN SHIRT.

LUCKILY THE BULLET WENT RIGHT THROUGH, RUSH. YOU'LL BE O.K.A.Y.!



DAWN WAS BREAKING AS THE TWO MEN STUMBLED BACK INTO CAMP. THEY WERE GREETED WARMLY BY THE TWO MILITARY POLICEMEN...



ALL THAT DAY THEY RESTED, AND WHEN NIGHT FELL AGAIN THEY PLANNED THEIR NEXT MOVE!

WELL, CHAPS, SUPPLIES ARE RUNNING LOW AND THE JAPS HERE HAVE WINDED US. MAYBE IT'S HEALTHIER FARTHER UP THE COAST.

HOW ABOUT LOOKING FOR A BOAT?

THAT'S IT, SIR. LET'S GET OFF THIS PERISHING ISLAND!



Chapter 5. TASK FORCE

WHEN RUSH'S LEG PERMITTED, THEY BEGAN THE LONG TREK UP THE EASTERN COAST OF BORNEO. BUT REDUCED TO MINIMUM RATIONS AND SUFFERING FROM FATIGUE, EACH MILE WAS A TANGLED NIGHTMARE...



YET IT SEEMED THAT THE PRIVATION DREW THE FOUR MEN EVEN CLOSER IN SPIRIT SO THAT EACH DREW STRENGTH AND SUPPORT FROM THE OTHERS.

THE DAYS PASSED AS THEY WORKED UP THE COAST, FOREVER DODGING ISOLATED ENEMY PATROLS AND SEARCHING WITH BUT SMALL HOPE FOR A BOAT. THEN FORTUNE SEEMED TO SMILE ON THEM...

A SHIP'S LIFEBOAT—
MUST HAVE BEEN WASHED
UP FROM A WRECK. IF IT
HAD A SAIL I COULD REALLY
GET YOU FELLOWS
SOMEWHERE.

THEN WE'LL
MAKE A
SAIL!

I'LL CHANCE THE
SEA RATHER THAN THAT
PERISHING JUNGLE...
OR THE JAPS!



THEY RESTED UP BEFORE DIGGING THE LIFEBOAT OUT OF THE SANDS— AND PROVISIONED IT WITH A QUANTITY OF FRESH FRUIT AND NUTS. THEN, ON A MOONLESS NIGHT . . .



A SUDDEN STACCATO VOLLEY OF RIFLE FIRE SHOCKED THEM INTO LIVING STATUES STARING AGHAST INTO THE DIMNESS ALONG THE BEACH . . .



RUSH'S COMMAND HAD BARELY LEFT HIS LIPS WHEN BURSTS OF ANSWERING FIRE CAME CRACKLING FROM OFF SHORE. IN SECONDS, THE EXCHANGE OF FIRE HAD QUICKENED INTO A SPIRITED BATTLE AS JAPANESE SOLDIERS CHALLENGED THE BOATS HEADING FOR THE SHORE.

IT'S AN
ATTACK!

LOOK! HERE COME
THE BOATS—ONLY
HALF-A-DOZEN
OF 'EM!



THE ENEMY HAD SIGHTED A PARTY OF AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS ATTEMPTING A BEACH LANDING. BUT THE SAVAGE RECEPTION CAUSED THE ATTEMPT TO BE CALLED OFF.

IT'S NO GOOD - WE'D NEVER GET OUT OF THE BOATS ALIVE! TURN BACK!



ALL BOATS SPUN ABOUT, THEIR CREWS FRANTICALLY PULLING OUT OF RANGE. BUT ONE WAS HOLED AND SANK, LEAVING CURSING MEN TO SWIM AFTER THE OTHER BOATS. BUT THERE WAS ONE MAN WHO THRASHED AND FLOUNDERED, PLAINLY IN TROUBLE, YET UTTERING NO CRY.



RUSH WAS THE FIRST TO SPOT THE STRUGGLING MAN, AND URGING THE OTHERS TO A SUPREME EFFORT, MANAGED TO GET THE BOAT LAUNCHED WITHOUT THE JAPS SEEING THEM. PUTTING THEIR WEIGHT BEHIND THE OARS, THEY PLOUGHED THROUGH THE WATER TOWARDS THE AUSTRALIAN.



AS THEY TURNED TO FOLLOW THE OTHER BOATS, THE AUSTRALIAN TOLD THEM EXCITING NEWS.

THERE'S A WHOLE FORCE OUT THERE IN SHIPS WAITING TO INVAD. WE WERE AN ADVANCE BEACH PARTY SUPPOSED TO GUIDE IN THE MAIN LANDINGS.





THEY CONTINUED IN SILENCE FOR A WHILE AND THEN THE AUSTRALIAN SPOKE AGAIN . . .



DOUGLAS NEWMAN AVOIDED RUSH'S SHARP LOOK. NO WORD PASSED BETWEEN THEM BUT EACH GUESSED WHAT THE OTHER WAS THINKING. OUT THERE, IN ONE OF THOSE SHIPS, LAY AUTHORITY! — *BRITISH NAVAL AUTHORITY.*

TWO HOURS LATER, THEY SIGHTED THE INVASION FORCE AND AT THE AUSTRALIAN'S DIRECTIONS MADE FOR THE FLAGSHIP.



QUESTIONED BY SUCCESSIVE OFFICERS, RUSH AND THE SURGEON LIEUTENANT FINALLY FOUND THEMSELVES BEFORE A BURLY ADMIRAL WHO PLIED THEM WITH EVEN MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BORNEO COASTLINE. THEN HE SEEMED TO COME TO A DECISION.

WE ALREADY KNOW SOMETHING OF THIS OTHER BEACH YOU SPEAK OF BUT NO DETAILED KNOWLEDGE. HOW ABOUT YOU TWO LEADING ANOTHER BEACH PARTY TO SHOW OUR MEN? WE'LL HAVE TO ACT FAST.



RUSH'S SILENCE BROUGHT AN ENQUIRING LOOK FROM THE ADMIRAL, THEN AS HIS FRIEND SPOKE, DOUGLAS' HEART SANK.

I... I UNDERSTAND YOU'VE PICKED UP SENIOR OFFICERS OF THE BRITISH NAVY, SIR. I - I THINK I SHOULD REPORT TO THEM FIRST!



BUT THE ADMIRAL HAD NO THOUGHT BUT FOR THE IMMEDIATE TASK OF INVASION...

SORRY, RUSHTON, BUT THOSE OFFICERS ARE ABOARD ANOTHER SHIP AND TIME'S AGAINST US. YOU'RE WORKING FOR ME AS FROM NOW! GET FED AND CLEANED UP - THEN REPORT HERE IN THIRTY MINUTES FOR ANOTHER BRIEFING.



SOON THE ADVANCE BEACH PARTY WAS NOSING IN TO THE CHANGED LANDING ZONE. THEIR JOB WAS TO SET UP NAVIGATIONAL AIDS TO DIRECT THE MAIN WAVE OF LANDING CRAFT TO FOLLOW.



WITH THIS PARTY WENT RUSH AND WILLIS IN ONE BOAT WHILE DOUGLAS NEWMAN AND FOSTER TOOK TO THE OTHER.

THE BOATS CREPT IN WITH MUFFLED OARS. ALL SEEMED QUIET. NO ENEMY—OR WAS HE LURKING, WAITING WITH FINGER ON THE TRIGGER . . .



FROM TEN MILES UP THE COAST, THERE CAME THE EXPECTED SOUNDS OF A FEINT ATTACK ON THE ORIGINAL BEACH.

AS RUSH HAD PREDICTED, THE BEACH WAS CLEAR OF JAPS. SIGNAL LIGHTS WINKED BACK AT THE FLEET - AND THE MAIN WAVE OF INVASION TROOPS SWEEPED SHOREWARDS.



BUT AT THAT SAME INSTANT, THE BEACH PARTY'S LUCK TURNED. SUDDENLY ENEMY SOLDIERS APPEARED AS IF FROM NOWHERE.



IN THE NICK OF TIME, DOUGLAS LEAPT TO HIS ASSISTANCE.



BUT, MOTORISED JAP
REINFORCEMENTS WERE
SURGING DOWN THE
INVASION BEACH . . .



IT SEEMED THAT THE SMALL BEACH
LANDING PARTY WOULD BE WIPED OUT,
WHEN, A HAIL OF BULLETS RIPPED
INTO THE JAPS FROM THE SEA . . .



... THE MAIN INVASION FORCE HAD
ARRIVED . . .

RUSH'S PANTING,
EXHAUSTED GROUP
WERE QUITE WILLING
TO LET THE MAIN
WAVE TAKE OVER
THE FIGHT...

AFTER THE
PERISHERS!

GIVE 'EM
BLAZES!



THEN, ABOVE THE DIN OF THE RETREATING BATTLE, RUSH HEARD A FAMILIAR VOICE. HE SPUN ROUND... THERE STOOD CAPTAIN EDWARDS, THE MAN WHO HAD PUT HIM UNDER ARREST.

HULLO, RUSHTON, I IMAGINE YOU'RE MORE SURPRISED THAN I AM. I'VE HEARD ALL ABOUT YOU AND NEWMAN HERE. SEEMS YOU'VE DONE A GREAT JOB OF WORK.



CAPTAIN EDWARDS TOLD THEM BRIEFLY OF HIS ESCAPE FROM BANDATANG. THEN...

BUT COMMANDER BARKER WAS, I REGRET TO SAY, KILLED DURING OUR ESCAPE. NOW, A COURT-MARTIAL IS ALWAYS AN UNPLEASANT THING — AND OUT OF RESPECT FOR COMMANDER BARKER, AND BECAUSE OF YOUR OWN EXEMPLARY CONDUCT, RUSHTON, I AM DROPPING THE CHARGE AGAINST YOU. IN ANY CASE, I'M SURE YOU'VE LEARNED YOUR LESSON... AND YOU SEEM TOO GOOD A FIGHTING MAN TO SPEND THE REST OF THE WAR IN THE JUG!



THEN WITH A FRIENDLY NOD, THE SENIOR OFFICER WALKED AWAY — LEAVING RUSH AND DOUGLAS NEWMAN SPEECHLESS WITH DELIGHT!

FREED IN SUCH AN UNEXPECTED MANNER FROM THE LONG BURDEN OF THEIR FEARS, THE TWO FRIENDS TURNED AGAIN TO WATCH THE INVASION WHICH THEY HAD HELPED SO MUCH TO LAUNCH . . .



A COUNTER-STROKE THAT WAS THE FORERUNNER OF MANY THAT WERE TO STEM THE TIDE OF JAPANESE CONQUESTS AND IN TIME WOULD BRING THE ONCE INVINCIBLE NIPPONESE EMPIRE PLUNGING TO DEFEAT.

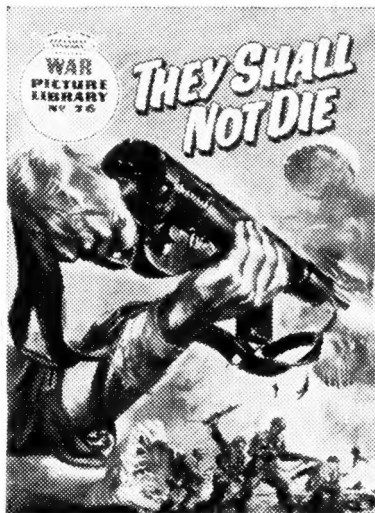
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